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Supporting Early Childhood Mental Health Sets Georgia's Kids Up for Success

A strong foundation is key for healthy brain development and long-term public safety & national security

Early childhood mental health (ECMH) is the developing ability of young children (birth to age 5) to form relationships with adults and peers; experience, express, and manage a range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn. Warm, responsive interactions with caregivers are necessary for children's brain development and ECMH.

However, some families face challenges (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, violence) that children endure as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs can derail early childhood development and lead to ECMH challenges. More than one-fifth of American infants and toddlers experience ACEs, and 9.5 to 14 percent of very young children have ECMH challenges (e.g., extreme sleeping difficulties, inconsolable crying, excessive hitting or biting, out-of-control tantrums, abnormal fearfulness).

ECMH challenges can have both short-term consequences (e.g., child care expulsion) and long-term consequences (e.g., decreased high school graduation, behavior problems, crime). These consequences can negatively impact community safety and national security in the long run.

Georgia policymakers must support interventions designed to prevent and treat ECMH challenges, including: home visiting programs; training for early childhood professionals; access to parent and early childhood mental health services; and developing an ECMH workforce.

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